



Statue of Marx and Engels in Marx-Engels-Forum, Berlin, Germany

The German Ideology

From August 1844, when they re-met in Paris, France, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels began a lifelong collaboration. They at once began to write together the book that was published the following year as “[The Holy Family](#)” – a polemic against the “Young Hegelians”, otherwise called “The Free”, who were a group of German political intellectuals (“Saint Bruno” Bauer, “Saint Max” Stirner, and others).

But it was in their second major joint work that the two managed to firmly lay down the basics of what we know as Marxism, in the book called “[The German Ideology](#)”, again critiquing the Young Hegelians, and now also Ludwig Feuerbach. This manuscript was written between 1845 and 1847 but it was never published, or even prepared for publication, during the lifetimes of the two authors, Marx and Engels.

The “[Theses on Feuerbach](#)” that we studied as our previous item are said to be notes of Marx’s in preparation for “The German Ideology”, according to the [Preface to this work in Progress Publishers’ Collected Works](#) of Marx, which also says of “The German Ideology” and its associated writings:

*“They were all written between the spring of 1845 and the spring of 1847, during Marx’s stay in Brussels, where he moved in February 1845 following his deportation from France by the Guizot government. Engels came to Brussels from Barmen in April 1845 and remained till August 1846. **This was the period when Marxism was finally evolved** as the scientific world outlook of the revolutionary proletariat. Marx and Engels had arrived at the decisive stage in working out the philosophical principles of scientific communism.”*

For those who seek the precise origin of “Marxism” this is the Holy Grail. Progress Publishers go on:

*“It was in The German Ideology that the materialist conception of history, **historical materialism**, was first formulated as an integral theory. Engels said later that this theory, which uncovered the genuine laws of social development and revolutionised the science of society, embodied the first of Marx’s great discoveries (the second being the theory of surplus value) which played the main role in transforming socialism from a utopia into a science.”*

What is this thing called “historical materialism”? Here are two paragraphs from the attached chapter of The German Ideology that is also downloadable via the link below.

"This conception of history depends on our ability to expound the real process of production, starting out from the material production of life itself, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this mode of production (i.e. civil society in its various stages), as the basis of all history; describing it in its action as the state, and to explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc. etc. arise from it, and trace their origins and growth from that basis. Thus the whole thing can, of course, be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another)..."

"It shows that history does not end by being resolved into "self-consciousness as spirit of the spirit", but that in it at each stage there is found a material result: a sum of productive forces, an historically created relation of individuals to nature and to one another, which is handed down to each generation from its predecessor; a mass of productive forces, capital funds and conditions, which, on the one hand, is indeed modified by the new generation, but also on the other prescribes for it its conditions of life and gives it a definite development, a special character. It shows that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances."

Later on the work says says "In reality and for the practical materialist, i.e. the communist, it is a question of revolutionising the existing world, of practically attacking and changing existing things."

The point is to change the world, as the eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach says.

In the last part of the chapter, in the part called “*Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas*”, you will read the following well-known, classic words:

“The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.”

The [Progress Publishers Preface](#) quotes Marx as writing, in 1859, about “The German Ideology”:

“We abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly as we had achieved our main purpose — self-clarification.”

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Karl Marx, The German Ideology, 1845-1847, Part 1, B, Illusion of the Epoch](#).
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